

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04 SIL-01 TRSE-00 OMB-01
ACDA-12 MCT-01 /086 W
-----108064 101950Z/45

P 101903Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1899
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN PRIORITY
AMCONSUL BELFAST

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK, EI
SUBJ: POSSIBLE SDLP SHOWDOWN WITH BRITISH OVER POWER
SHARING

REF: (A) DUBLIN 2920 (1977); (B) LONDON 388; (C) BELFAST

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THE FOLLOWING IS TRANSMITTED ON BEHALF OF CONGEN
BELFAST; EMBASSY COMMENT FOLLOWS BELOW.

1. SUMMARY - THE PARTY MOST RESPONSIBLY REPRESENTING
NORTHERN IRELAND'S MINORITY, CATHOLIC COMMUNITY -- THE
SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOR PARTY (SDLP) -- MAY BE
HEADING TOWARD AN ATTEMPT TO PRESSURE THE BRITISH TO
IMPOSE POWER SHARING ON THE MAJORITY, PROTESTANT
COMMUNITY. THE SDLP APPEARS TO EXPECT COOPERATION FROM
THE IRISH REPUBLIC, AND WOULD LIKE THE USG TO USE ITS
INFLUENCE WITH HMG IN A SIMILAR SENSE. THE CONSULATE
GENERAL BELIEVES THAT US INVOLVEMENT BEYOND THE
PRESIDENT'S LAST AUGUST 30 STATEMENT WOULD NOT BE
JUSTIFIED. -- END SUMMARY

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2. SDLP DEPUTY LEADER JOHN HUME JANUARY 7 GAVE SENATOR
THOMAS EAGLETON (ESCORTED BY THE CONSUL GENERAL) AN
EXPOSE OF WHAT APPEARS TO BE A SHARP TURN IR SDLP
POLICY. HUME MADE HIS PITCH AT A LUNCHEON AT HIS HOME
IN LONDONDERRY ATTENDED BY THREE OTHER SECOND-LEVEL SDLP
LEADERS. H SAID THAT HE SPOKE FOR HIS PARTY, ALTHOUGH

WITH SOME PERSONAL NUANCES. AT A DINNER THE NIGHT BEFORE WE (AND AN OFFICIAL OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE) RECEIVED CONSISTENT, IF MORE GENERAL REMARKS FROM THE SDLP'S THIRD RANKING LEADER, AUSTIN CURRIE .

3. HUME DEPARTED FROM THE CURRENT TALKS BETWEEN LOCAL POLITICAL LEADERS AND THE NIO ON AN INTERIM DEVOLUTION OF POWER TO A NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY. HE SAID THAT SECRETARY OF STATE MASON HAD LAUNCHED THE TALKS WITH THE ASSERTION THAT A SOFTENING IN THE OFFICIAL UNIONISTS' POSITION ON POWER SHARING HAD MADE AN OPENING FOR THE TALKS. THE SDLP HAD LOOKED FOR SUCH A SOFTENING AND HAD FOUND NONE.

4. MODERATE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY, HUME CONTINUED, IN FOUNDED THE SDLP IN 1970 HAD ACCEPTED THE NI POLITICAL FRAMEWORK. THE RISK TO THEM WAS HIGH, AND WAS ACCEPTABLE ONLY IF THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN TURN WAS ENABLED TO PARTICIPATE IN POWER. THE UK WAS THEREFORE COMMITTED (HUME WAS NOT SPECIFIC) TO IMPOSE POWER SHARING, AND THE POLICY WAS SUPPORTED BY ALL MAJOR PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT (98 PERCENT) AND BY THE IRISH REPUBLIC. HMG, AS A SOVEREIGN GOVERNMENT, HAS THE DUTY TO IMPOSE ITS WILL. VIOLENCE WILL EVENTUALLY RECUR IF THE CATHOLICS ARE NOT GIVEN POLITICAL LEGITIMACY, BUT IN THE NEXT ROUND OF TERRORISM THE MODERATE CATHOLICS

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WILL BE SILENCED.

5. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, HUME SAID THE SDLP WOULD TELL THE NIO AT THEIR NEXT MEETING (JANUARY 11) THAT HMG MUST IMPOSE A POWER-SHARING FRAMEWORK ON THE UNIONIST (PROTESTANT) COMMUNITY. IF THE BRITISH DID NOT STRENGTHEN THEIR POSITION, PRIME MINISTER LYNCH WOULD BRING PRESSURE TO BEAR FROM THE SOUTH. ULTIMATELY, LYNCH COULD SOFTEN THE IRISH GOVERNMENT'S CURRENT HARD POSITION TOWARD THE PROVISIONAL IRA, WHICH WOULD NEGATIVELY AFFECT SECURITY OPERATIONS IN THE NORTH. ASKED WHETHER THE SDLP HAD LYNCH'S ASSURANCES OF SUPPORT ON THIS POLICY LINE, HUME SAID HE ASSUMED LYNCH WOULD ACT AS HE SUGGESTED.

6. THE USG HAD TAKEN RESPONSIBILITY FOR SHUTTING OFF THE FLOW OF AMERICAN ARMS AND MONEY TO THE PIRA. AS STATED IN PRESIDENT CARTER'S AUGUST 30 DECLARATION, THE AIM WAS THE ESTABLISHMENT BY PEACEFUL MEANS OF A SOLUTION IN NI HAVING WIDE ACCEPTANCE. HUME THEREBY ASSERTED THAT US RESPONSIBILITY EXTENDED A FURTHER STEP: TO SEE THAT A POLITICAL SOLUTION IS WORKED OUT,

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WHICH IF NECESSARY MEANS JOINING THE REPUBLIC IN PRESSURING HMG. WE TOLD HUME THAT THE US INTEREST WAS CLEAR IN STOPPING THE EXPORT OF US ARMS AND MONEY IN SUPPORT OF TERRORISM ABROAD, BUT THE ADDITIONAL STEP HE RECOMMENDED WAS ENTIRELY DIFFERENT AND NOT THE TYPE ENVISAGED IN THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT. THE RESPONSE WAS THAT THE IRISH-AMERICAN COMMUNITY IMPOSED A US INTEREST IN THAT SENSE.

7. COMMENT: HUME HAS STRUCK US AS PERHAPS THE ONE POLITICAL LEADER FROM NI WHO MIGHT BE BIG ENOUGH FOR THE BIG TIME. WE UNDERSTAND HIS PRESENT CONCERNS AND FRUSTRATIONS, BUT THIS PITCH APPEARS UNREALISTICALLY PROVINCIAL.

8. HUME'S ARGUMENT APPEARS TO REFLECT THE KIND OF THOUGHT REPORTED IN REF A AND DISCUSSED IN REF B. AS SEEN FROM BELFAST, THE OFFICIAL UNIONISTS ARE INDEED INFLEXIBLE, DESPITE THE SOFTER IMPRESSION THEY HAD GIVEN BEFORE THE MASON TALKS BEGAN. THE SDLP, ON THE OTHER CONFIDENTIAL

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HAND, IS THREATENED BY EROSION AS DIRECT RULE CONTINUES, AND MOST PEOPLE BELIEVE IRA VIOLENCE WILL RECUR, LACKING A BROAD SETTLEMENT. BUT THE BIG ISSUE IN IRELAND APPEARS TO US AS A SECONDARY ONE IN THE UK. MASON IS WEARING AWAY AT THE UNIONISTS. IT IS A SLOW PROCESS, BUT IT SEEMS BETTER TO PERSIST THAN THE RISKS -- WITH SOME HYPERBOLE -- OF TRYING TO COERCE A MILLION STIFF-NECKED ULSTER PROTESTANTS. NOT EVERYONE HERE THINKS THEY HAVE BECOME PAPER TIGERS.

9. HUME WILL VISIT WASHINGTON IN LATE JANUARY ON A MISSION FOR THE EEC. LYNCH'S JANUARY 8 STATEMENT (REF C) MAY CHANGE THE TACTICAL SITUATION, ALTHOUGH WE ASSUME THERE IS SOME COORDINATION IN THE SDLP AND IRISH POSITIONS. BUT IF HUME LOBBIES FOR THE ABOVE THESIS, HE MIGHT BE REMINDED THAT USG PRESSURE ON THE UK AS HE SUGGESTS WOULD IMPLY AN ASSUMPTION OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANY RESULTING VIOLENCE. WE SEE NO US INTEREST IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO JUSTIFY TAKING THAT CHANCE.

10. EMBASSY COMMENT: WE CONCUR IN BELFAST'S VIEW THAT THE USG SHOULD SCRUPULOUSLY AVOID DEEPER INVOLVEMENT IN NI, AND SEEK TO DISPEL ANY EXPECTATION ON THE PART OF THE SDLP OR THE GOI THAT WE MIGHT BE WILLING TO INTERVENE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PARTY LINE, SELFDETERMINATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LONDON00480
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780015-0233
Format: TEL
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780181/aaaacqkz.tel
Line Count: 199
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 67aeeae4-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 DUBLIN 2920, 78 BELFAST 4, 78 LONDON 388
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3802005
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: POSSIBLE SDLP SHOWDOWN WITH BRITISH OVER POWER SHARING
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK, EI, SDLP
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/67aeeae4-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014